Joel Kirshner

Period 8

March 10, 2011

Changing our Ways

“I have a dream that one day right here in Washington D.C. a black man may sit in the Oval Office and run the president from the point of view of an American, not from that of a black man or a white man.” Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. did not actually speak these words on August 28, 1963, on Capitol Hill; in fact, he probably did not even think them. At that point in time, an African American President seemed impossible. Dr. King was speaking to gain the right to sit next to a white man in a restaurant, not to become President. Who could have guessed that less than forty-six years later, not ten miles away from the very spot that Dr. King gave his famed “I Have a Dream” speech, Barack Obama, an African American man born to a family in despair, may be sworn in as President. Imagine, a man who at birth would not be allowed to drink in the same water fountain as a white boy, who acquired the most prodigious position that this great nation has to offer. The election of Barack Obama has opened up new doors into the world of equality. His lifetime, from a troubled childhood, to an unexceptional early career, to a presidential election, provides a truly inspirational tale of epic proportions and provides a gateway into a new era of freedom.

Many times in American history, we see a President who is a “common man.” American citizens prefer people who they can relate to. Americans voted for Barack Obama for his political beliefs and plans, but also for his humble beginnings. Barack Obama was born to a mixed racial couple whose marriage would not last long. Obama’s mother Ann Dunham and his father Barack Obama Sr. divorced when the younger Barack was just a baby. This left Barack and his siblings to a single mother on a small salary. In Barack Obama’s autobiography, he explained, “Sometimes, when I brought friends home after school, my mother would overhear them remark about the lack of food in the fridge or the less-than-perfect housekeeping, and she would pull me aside and let me know that she was a single mother going to school again and raising two kids…” Ultimately, perhaps it was this, Obama’s relation to average Americans that allowed him to be elected as President of the United States. Perhaps, when millions casted their ballots on November 4, 2008, when they were forced to choose between two equally qualified men, it was the basketball player who they voted for. It was the father of two young girls who they voted for. It was the community service worker who they voted for—not the military man with nearly thirty years on the average voter. Granted, most voters were decided regarding their candidate for the 2008 Presidential Election based on politics, but a very crucial percentage were swayed by the appeal of a common man.

Everyone knows the old cliché that there is a first time for everything. What is usually true, but hardly spoken, is that there is also a second time for everything… and a third time... and a fourth. This is what is truly great about the election of our 44th President, Barack Obama. He was the first African American President, and as we all know, history is bound to repeat itself. Similar to the legendary Jackie Robinson, the first African American baseball player, it is very possible that more will follow. I believe that in a position where no black man once dreamed of sitting, perhaps many will sit for generations to come. Plain and simple, many more African Americans may now be granted the opportunity to run for President. Obama’s humble uprising provides a segment of the significance of his ultimate triumph over John McCain, a man who never knew hunger. It proves that America is a nation where any person, be it a man or woman, black or white, rich or poor, can do great things.

Given all that has been stated, it is unquestionable that Barack Obama has opened up a new door to American minorities. A change in American politics was seen immediately upon Obama’s election. When Obama left his position as Senator for the Presidency, he left a spot that needed filling. Another African American, Roland Burris, took his place. ABC News reported, “Roland Burris will be seated this week as a U.S. senator, taking over the position vacated by President-elect Barack Obama…” This cannot be a coincidence. Obama sees it necessary for more African Americans, and other minorities to become involved him politics. Additionally, since Obama’s Presidency, starting in 2008, ten African Americans have taken office in the United States House of Representatives. Seven of those were elected in November of 2010, and three in 2008, on the same Election Day that Obama was elected President. Before Obama’s Presidency, no more than four African Americans have acquired such a position in the same year. We see here again a great increase in African American political participation. Another such instance was seen in New York shortly after Obama took office, when David Paterson, another African American was elected Governor. As evident, an immediate increase in African American politicians has appeared since Obama’s Presidency, and one must assume that even more are to follow.

Barack Obama’s life, starting with his humbling childhood, to his start in politics, to his Presidency has inspired African American children and adults across America to become more involved in politics. Barack Obama, born to a soon-to-be single mother grew up as an average kid, but through determination and strength of mind, he assumed the position of President of the United States. This has been influential to millions, and has taught all that while there may be hurdles between where they are, and where they urn to be, no hurdle is too high to clear. Should Obama never have been elected, the first African American Presidency may not have occurred for decades to come, but as is, the job is now open to people of all color, race, religion, and gender alike. The change has been immediate, many new African American politicians have erupted onto the National stage, but for years to come, there will only be more, and more.